

November 1, 2015

Pelagic Observer Program (POP)  
Field Instructions

I. BACKGROUND

The Atlantic pelagic longline fleet is managed under the Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan (HMS-FMP) and under the authority of the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson Act). The HMS-FMP was prepared by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) with jurisdiction over the U.S. coastal waters of the Northeast Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean Sea out to the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), as well as U.S. flagged vessels operating outside the EEZ.

The Fishery Conservation Amendments of 1990 (FCA), Public Law 101-627, transferred management authority over the Atlantic swordfish fishery to the Secretary of Commerce. The Secretary issued emergency regulations on June 12, 1991, that were consistent with the November 1990 recommendation of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), and were made effective through December 9, 1991.

Modifications over the years were made to the various Fishery Management Plans regulating Atlantic swordfish, sharks, billfish, and tunas which finally culminated into the comprehensive HMS-FMP published in May 28, 1999 with those regulations becoming effective on July 1, 1999. Specific current rules are summarized below:

- 1) redefine the swordfish management unit to include the entire North Atlantic Ocean North of 5 degrees North latitude and portions of the South Atlantic;
- 2) continue the minimum size limit for swordfish of greater than or equal to 25 inches (63 cm), carcass length -- cleithrum to keel (CK);
- 3) establish an annual total allowable catch by gear and species;
- 4) specify bycatch limits that apply after a quota closure for purse seine, harpoon, longline, and gillnet;
- 5) **require vessel operators to carry NMFS-approved observers on permitted vessels upon the request of NMFS;**

6) specify minimum size limits for billfish species for the recreational fishery and prohibit the landing of billfish by commercial gear;

7) establish the categories of small coastal, large coastal, and pelagic species with landing prohibitions on selected shark species;

8) establish area closures for bluefin tuna, swordfish, and billfish;

9) make other changes to facilitate the management of the Atlantic pelagic species.

Hence, the creation of the Pelagic Observer Program (**POP**). This program is directed by the SE Fisheries Science Center, and places observers aboard U.S. longline vessels who currently hold swordfish permits. A computer generated list of boats by quarter and area provides 8% coverage (in fishing sets).

These boats are notified as to their selection in writing and are required to respond initially in writing with requested information and then to contact the coordinator by phone or fax 5 business days prior to all departures during the selection period or until a trip is observed.

## II. OBJECTIVES

A. Provide trained observer personnel to meet **8%** coverage of U.S. Commercial longline fleet (in fishing sets).

B. Obtain target and bycatch numbers on pelagic species caught on longline gear.

C. Record length measurements and sex on all pelagic species brought on board. (swordfish, tunas, billfish, sharks and other finfish)

D. Record detailed gear characteristics of commercial longline vessels.

## III. OBSERVER DUTIES

The observer's primary responsibility is to identify and record all animals caught during longline operations, take required measurements and samples, **report witnessed fisheries and MARPOL violations seen during normal observer duties**, and obtain dressed weights on all tagged swordfish, tuna, and **sharks** landed.

Due to liability and safety considerations observers will not participate as deck hands during the fishing operations or stand regular watches. Observers are encouraged to assist in daily cleanup duties and lend a hand once fishing operations are secured.

Observers will abide by normal living routines aboard the vessel and adopt the standard habits of the captain and crew as regards use of living space, preparation and consumption of meals, storage of personal gear, personal hygiene and chores. Observers will abide by all POP safety policies and will conduct themselves in a professional fashion. It is the POP policy that observers may not consume alcohol on board a vessel or at/on the dock. The POP also has a zero tolerance for possession and/or use of illegal drugs at any time.

Other duties include: record tagging information, assist captain with completing Pelagic Logbook Set Forms and obtaining a copy of the weigh out sheet from the dealer or captain.

**NOTE: WHEN POSSIBLE OBTAIN INDIVIDUAL WEIGHTS OF FINFISH AND SMALL TUNAS.**

Observers are provided with the current fisheries regulations (see Tab#8 REGULATIONS) and any updated materials received by the POP, regarding changes in regulations, closures, or notice to fishers.(see Tab#8, MISC) However, interpretation of these materials will be left to the captain or crew.

Observers must provide access to data collected when requested by any NMFS, Coast Guard or state official. In the event data is provided to an official, the observer will contact the POP coordinator and document all materials turned over to the officer.

**NOTE: ATTEMPT TO PROVIDE COPIES OF DATA RATHER THAN ORIGINALS.**

An additional day should be taken once landing and weigh out is finished to review data forms for completeness, make copies of all data and then arrange for shipping of data and samples.

If logistics allow, observers may come through Miami to debrief with program staff. Otherwise data should be sent UPS **Next Day Air Early AM** to the Miami lab.

Once the data is received, POP personnel will contact the observer by phone to arrange a time for a debriefing. During debriefing, observers are provided feedback on their data collection, data questions are resolved, information is shared and field supplies are replenished.

**NOTE: YOUR TRIP IS NOT OVER UNTIL YOU COMPLETE A DEBRIEFING WITH THE POP STAFF.**

#### IV. SAFETY

This section has been replaced by a safety manual. Please refer to the manual for all POP safety information and policies.

#### V. COMMUNICATIONS (see TAB# 1 COMMUNICATION for more details)

Once an observer is deployed, he/she must update Miami once each day by email ([popobserver@noaa.gov](mailto:popobserver@noaa.gov)) or if email is not available, by land line (1-800-858-0624) until the boat leaves the dock.

At sea, observers should make contact with the Miami Lab once a week via inReach messenger to report their work status, number of sets completed, and whether there has been any incidental take. Reporting can also be done by email or sat phone if available on the vessel: [popobserver@noaa.gov](mailto:popobserver@noaa.gov) and **1-305-361-4563**.

Upon landing, observers must immediately contact the Miami Lab by email or landline to discuss post trip details and determine if an observer should remain on site for a debriefing.

Observers are provided with contact names and numbers to assist with logistical or shipping needs; however, travel arrangements and questions should be directed to IAP/ Riverside office staff.

SEFSC SWITCHBOARD	(305)361-5761
POP FAX#	(305)361-4282
POP LAND LINE	1-800-858-0624
POP AT SEA	(305)361-4563
USCG SAR Command	(757)398-6390
<b>UPS Account#</b>	<b>W8098F</b>

#### VI. PROCEDURES

##### A. DATA FORMS

##### 1) Longline Gear Log

A detailed description of the gear being used (see Tab#4 Gear Log Instructions and Distance Calculation Instructions for more details).

**NOTE: CHANGES FROM HAUL TO HAUL (E.G. % LIGHT STICK COLORS USED OR DROPLINE LENGTHS) SHOULD BE RECORDED IN THE COMMENTS SECTION OF THE LONGLINE HAUL LOG. AT THE END OF TRIP USE HAUL LOGS TO DETERMINE IF MULTIPLE GEAR LOGS ARE NEEDED AND USE THE DISTANCE**

## CALCULATION TABLE TO COMPUTE AVERAGES.

### 2) Longline Haul Log

Information relating to the gear deployment/set and retrieval/haul are recorded. (see Tab#3 Haul Log Instructions for more details)

### 3) Individual Animal Log

Information on each fish that is observed as caught on the longline. Information includes: fish identification to species, alive/dead on hook, kept or released, sex, length measurements, tag/release information, dressed weights and biological sampling. (see Tab#5 Animal Log Instructions for more details)

A Comment field for individual animals was added in 2004 and may include details **how it was dressed or if it was landed illegally (e.g., a shark that had fins removed at sea).**

**NOTE: ALL INCIDENTAL TAKE (TURTLES, MAMMALS AND SEA BIRDS) ARE RECORDED ON BOTH THE ANIMAL LOG AND ONE ADDITIONAL FORM DESCRIBED BELOW.**

### 4) Protected species forms: Sea Turtle Life History Form, Marine Mammal Life History Form, and Sea Bird Life History Form

These forms are completed as applicable for each turtle, marine mammal, or bird involved in the gear. Complete as much information as possible given the equipment you have available and whether the captain brings the animal on board. If the animal appears to be comatose, a request should be made to bring it aboard, but the decision remains with the captain. Refer to form manuals for protocols, and apply them to your specific situation.

All observers will receive training and carry required permits in the field. At a minimum, protected species are to be photographed to verify identification and gear involvement (e.g. how hooked and/or how entangled).

### 5) Catch Summary (optional)

**The Pelagic Logbook Set Form is not an observer program data form—do not submit with your data.** However it is mandatory for the owner/operator to submit them in compliance with permit requirements. Please assist the skipper in completing this form as accurately as possible. Use the Catch Summary sheets we provide to total daily catch numbers. Record summarized catch (both kept and discards) in your field diary and give original catch summary sheets to the captain.

## *Paperwork Reduction Act*

Some of the data we collect may require you to ask the captain or owner questions about safety gear, fishing gear, or other items. These questions have gone through review as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA).

### B. Field Identification

Reference materials are provided to the observer to assist in making accurate identifications of pelagic species:

Guide to Sharks, Tunas & Billfishes of the U.S. Atlantic & Gulf of Mexico.

Marine Mammal & Turtles of the U.S. Atlantic & Gulf of Mexico

**A guide for Atlantic Coast fishes**

Fish Identification Supplemental Guide

***Photographs must be taken in the following circumstances; to help POP staff identify an unknown animal; to document a rare fish; to verify species identification and document gear involvement of all incidental take (turtles, mammals, sea birds).***

If a fish is dead and manageable, an observer should request that it be brought on board to get an actual measurement, biological sample or a better photo opportunity. If species identity is in question, record the known group name (e.g. BIL) on the Individual Animal Log, take enough photos (at least 2) showing prominent features and collect parts (e.g. skin patch, DNA sample) or collect the whole fish.

Document all photos by using a Photo Log. (see Tab#5 for the form) Photos taken to document a specific fish also need to have the total number photos taken recorded on the Individual Animal Log. Photos of the boat, gear and fishing operations can be useful. However these photos should not be taken without with the captain's permission.

### C. Length Measurements

Refer to the Individual Animal Log Instructions and Appendix 1 for measurement instructions. (See Tab#5 for details)

Unless working on deck is unsafe, observers will record the required measurements for all species brought aboard (priority: swordfish, tunas, turtles, billfish, sharks and finfish).

#### **NOTE: DO NOT HANDLE LIVE SHARKS AND RAYS**

The observer should record an estimated length for all released or discarded animals, to the nearest foot and convert to cm on the data form.

### D. Biological Sampling

All new POP observers are required to collect gonadal material until sex identification of swordfish, tunas and billfish is verified. Sampling will not be done unless proper equipment, training, protocols and permits have been provided. Whole specimens may be requested to be brought back to the dock but should only be shipped with the coordinators' authorization.

#### **NOTE: REVIEW POP BIOLOGICAL SAMPLING REQUIREMENTS EACH QUARTER FOR CURRENT SAMPLING PROTOCOLS.**

A sample label will be included with all biological samples collected. Use sharpie pens provided to fill out the labels as pencil or ink will fade or smear.

Whole fish specimens or fish parts should be placed in multiple plastic bags, provided by POP and stored on ice or kept frozen. If multiple parts are collected for a single specimen, each part should be placed into a separate plastic bag and labeled with the trip#, date, species abbreviation(SWO), tissue type(gonad), and a carcass tag or unique sample number (not more than five characters because that is the limit accepted in the POP database e.g., SW001) for each fish sampled. Then combine the smaller bags, and triple bag in larger plastic bags. The carcass tag number or unique sample number is also recorded on the Individual Animal Log, so that a length measurement, sex and a dressed weight can be recovered for each sample.

For a tag recapture animal, special biological sampling is required (see Tab#6). Tag information is also recorded on the Individual Animal Log. All tag recapture fish are important.

However, never sacrifice a live fish to recover a tag.

#### E. FIELD DIARY

The field diary should be used to document events or actions that occur **in real time (not as a summary)** during a single deployment and backup data information as well as all billable hours.

(See Tab#1 Field Diary Guidelines for more details)

Your field diary is an important data element. Include original field diary pages for each trip submitted. The Field diary notebook can be used for multiple trips, however to ensure individual vessel confidentiality, **observers must remove pages from a completed trip prior to another deployment.**

#### VII. Shipping Procedures

At the conclusion of your trip (either after you return home or if possible while still on travel), make copies of all your data forms and send the originals to the POP. Please note that due to data confidentiality rules it is unacceptable to take your data to a location where a third party does the copying. **You must do the copying yourself.**

All data and/or samples will be shipped **UPS Next Day Air Early AM**. If you land on a weekend or holiday you may have to purchase a cooler and ice to keep samples cool until you can ship. You can arrange for pickup service (1-800-742-5877 or [www.ups.com](http://www.ups.com)) or take to the nearest UPS Store or Customer Center.

All biological samples should be kept on ice or frozen until they can be shipped by UPS.

**NOTE: NEVER SHIP DATA, PRESERVED SAMPLES (e.g. biopsy) OR SD cards WITH PERISHABLE BIOLOGICAL SAMPLES.**

Pre-addressed UPS labels are provided by POP; **make sure you use the correct one (e.g. data to Miami, BFT samples to PC, etc.)**. Packaging is the responsibility of the observer and might require some creativity.

The major concern is to minimize smell and leakage throughout transport. **DO NOT SHIP WITH ICE!** Use coated boxes with insulated liners when possible. Triple bag samples with plastic bags and fill any air spaces with insulation (newspaper is good). ALL bags must be SEALED (e.g. tied or ziplocked). If you use a Styrofoam container, you need to put these inside a cardboard box and label to be accepted by UPS.

**NOTE: ALWAYS RECORD THE TRACKING NUMBER PRIOR TO SHIPPING.**

Shipping Address:   ATTN: Sascha Cushner (for data)  
                          ATTN: Ben Mann (for perishable samples)  
                          Southeast Fisheries Science Center  
                          75 Virginia Beach Dr.  
                          Miami FL. 33149

See example UPS label at the end of this section.

#### VIII. EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

The observer will be provided with all field equipment necessary to meet the needs of the project. An equipment checklist will be signed by the observer upon checkout and then by the coordinator upon check in. The following personal items are suggested:

- Sun glasses
- Sun screen
- Hat
- Personal toiletries including a towel
- Deck shoes (closed toed)
- Candy, books, ~~walkman~~ iPod, etc.
- Sea sickness medicine
- Bedding (sleeping bag or sheet & blanket)
- Clothing appropriate for weather conditions

Smooth seas and good fishing!

